

Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League

www.BREDL.org PO Box 88 Glendale Springs, North Carolina 28629 BREDL@skybest.com (336) 982-2691

February 15, 2008

William B. Sansom, Chairman
Board of Directors
400 West Summit Hill Drive
Knoxville, Tennessee 37902

Dear Chairman Sansom:

On behalf of the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League, I write to request that the Tennessee Valley Authority Board of Directors abandon its ongoing effort to open a new nuclear power station at the Bellefonte site in Jackson County, Alabama. The principal reason for my request today is because of our lack of confidence in the ability of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission to enforce regulations designed to protect our health and safety. In view of this failing, we call upon the TVA Board to act in the best interest of its customers, the 109 municipal utility companies and 50 cooperatives that resell TVA power, and the people of Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, Virginia and North Carolina: Withdraw your nuclear license application for Bellefonte.

According to its annual report, "TVA was created to improve navigation on the Tennessee River, reduce flood damage, provide agricultural and industrial development, and provide electric power to the Tennessee Valley region." ^a You are also charged with environmental stewardship.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission was established in 1974 to set radiation standards and to license and inspect commercial nuclear power plants. However, instead of being a nuclear watchdog, the NRC has become a lapdog of the industry it oversees. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission prides itself on being independent, but the sad truth is that the nuclear industry holds sway. Allow me to give some examples.

First, in 2005 Duke Energy Corporation shipped four experimental plutonium fuel assemblies to its Catawba nuclear power plant. Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League challenged Duke's request for an exemption from security regulations on strategic nuclear material from theft. The NRC's Atomic Safety and Licensing Board approved the exemptions with conditions, but these conditions were never fulfilled.

Second, in 2002 FirstEnergy Nuclear Operating Company discovered a large hole in the Davis-Besse nuclear plant's reactor vessel. The General Accounting Office labeled this "the most serious safety issue confronting the nation's commercial nuclear power industry since the accident at Three Mile Island in 1979." The GAO concluded, "NRC should have but did not identify or prevent the vessel head corrosion at Davis-Besse because both its inspections at the plant and its assessments of the operator's performance yielded inaccurate and incomplete information on plant safety conditions." ^b A nuclear catastrophe was averted by sheer luck in Ohio.

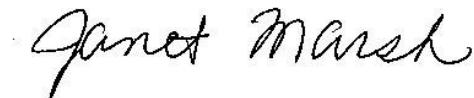
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Third, last month the Office of the Inspector General issued a report which detailed the history of the NRC's repeated failure to enforce fire barrier regulations for nuclear reactors. Tests completed in 1993 revealed that fire barriers used in 17 nuclear reactors did not meet federal standards. But the NRC balked and did not order its own tests until 2005; Sandia National Labs determined that the fire barriers supposed to last one hour would fail in just 13 minutes. The Inspector General concluded: "As of December 2007, no fire-endurance tests have been conducted to qualify Hemyc as an NRC-approved 1-hour or 3-hour fire barrier for installation at [nuclear power plants]." ^c

I need not remind the TVA Board that the fire at its Browns Ferry nuclear station resulted in fire barrier regulations designed to prevent the recurrence of such an accident, standards which apparently the NRC has not enforced since 1980.

The TVA Board must take responsibility in this matter. You cannot, you must not entrust the lives of people in seven states to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Withdraw your nuclear license application for Bellefonte.

Respectfully,



Janet Marsh
Executive Director

Cc: Tom Kilgore, President and CEO

Citations

- a) Tennessee Valley Authority Annual Form 10-K Filed 12/12/07, Securities and Exchange Commission
- b) *Nuclear Regulation: NRC Needs to More Aggressively and Comprehensively Resolve Issues Related to the Davis-Besse Nuclear Power Plant's Shutdown*, General Accounting Office Report, May 2004, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d04415.pdf>
- c) *NRC's Oversight of Hemyc Fire Barriers*, Case No. 05-46, Special Inquiry, Office of the Inspector General, January 2008 <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/insp-gen/2008/el-05-46.pdf>